Environmental Concerns in the Select Novels of Leslie Marmon Silko: A Study
A Resume

Submitted for the award of *Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)*
in the subject of English
under the Faculty of Arts

to the
SWAMI RAMANAND TEERTH
MARATHWADA UNIVERSITY, NANDED
by

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25 January, 2018

Introduction

Environmental problems have compounded during the last few decades due to rising pollution, diminishing green cover, increasing over consumption, frequent oil spills, nuclear hazards and increasing toxicity. Green activists, ecologists, environmentalists and academicians have at various points and places, been expressing concerns about increasing environmental degradation. As, art and literature are not immune from socio-cultural ecological scenario and in fact mirror it, they invariably become vehicles for articulating these concerns. Ecocriticism as a new critical discourse analyzes literature's engagement with ecologically vital issues and has repeatedly highlighted the need for rediscovering human relationship with the environment around. Contrary to the anthropocentric focus of modernism; ecocriticism has highlighted the possibilities of art and literature in helping to recreate a symbiotic relationship of humans with biotic and a biotic components of the environment. Ecocriticsm, as defined by Cheryl Glotfelty in The Ecocriticism Reader is "the study of the relation between literature and the physical environment."

The present study attempts to study Environmental Concern in the select novels of Native American writer Leslie Marmon Silko– a novelist, short story writer, poet and an essayist in her work does not merely portray Native Americans. She starts with some particular Indian locality and the descriptions of the life and local issues of Native Americans. Later the writer elevates the ethnic problems of local character to a universal level offering some philosophical, moral, and spiritual insights into the life and fate of humanity and ways towards its betterment. Silko does not believe in an exclusive Native

American aesthetics. She is the only writer who mostly used ecocritical concept in her literary works. Silko's novels show the relationship between man and nature. Her novels disclose the fact that Nature is the root of everything, her description of man and nature, the dominance of white people, the problems of women and especially the different cultures, festivals of indigenous Native Americans. Her literary works are linked by Pubelo ancestry.

2. Significance of the study:

The title of the research work itself suggests the significance of ecological approach to maintain the proper balance between man and nature. The study is very significant as it reveals the environmental concerns of Leslie Marmon Silko's concern for the humanity in general. Silko does not believe in an exclusive Native American aesthetics. When asked about it, she answers: "You can go and impose such differences, but I think that really strong writing springs from such depth of the psyche that there aren't such differences" (Silko, 1986, 130). Silko's contribution to both the mainstream and Naive American writing lies in her typically Indian perspectives on and treatment of land, language, and identity that she sees as interrelated. For Silko, land is a living entity, life-sustaining Mother Earth which nourishes, protects comforts, inspires and gives strength. On the other hand, separation from the land a center, an embodiment of history and ideas means getting lost in wilderness, destruction, that is, turning upon each other and the earth.

Silko sees the solution to people's present plight, their disorientation in the restoration of the proper order of the universe and of the former balance between the

male and female principles both in Indian society and a person himself. By this she offers a new way of existence to the patriarchal, commodified white world. Tayo's, who represents the "sickness" of both his people and the white world, "recovery" starts with his coming home, his reconnection to the community and the land. Silko's – an Indian writer's – holistic, ecological view of the universe manifests itself in Tayo's sudden realization that his "sickness was only part of something larger, and his cure would be found only in something great and inclusive of everything" (Silko, 1986, 125-6), that the words "we" and "us", despite the Army doctor's claims, are very powerful to one's personal recovery. As there is a reciprocal interrelation between all animate and inanimate things on earth, the right order of the universe should be reestablished to cure the human race.

3. **Objectives of the Research:**

1. To explain the relationship between Man and Nature.
2. To highlight the impact of deforestation on Nature.
3. To show the humiliation of women due to gender inequality.
4. To focus on the conflict between Anglo-Americans and Native Americans.
5. To study the writer's concern for conquest and beauty.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Most of the critics have shed light on one or the other aspect of the works of Silko. Mary Ellen Snodgrass focuses on the minor characters, divinities, events, historic eras,

significant figures, places and also about Silko's family background, in her Marmon Silko: A Literary Companion.

S. Holme's The "Lie" of the Land: Native sovereignty, Indian Literary Nationalism, and Early Indigenism in L. M. Silko's *Ceremony*. The book focuses light on the imaginary land. The lie land is holistic and which healing Tayo.

B O'Meara's The Ecological Politics of Leslie Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* reveals the importance of history and prophecy in human life.

Apart from all these reviews the present research work entitled "Ecological Explorations in the select novels of Leslie Marmon Silko", attempts to study almost all the aspects of Silko's novels. The present research attempts to prove the power and beauty of nature. The work focuses light on the relationship between man and nature, nature and nature, man and man. The work reaches to the conclusion by establishing the truth about the dominancy of human culture over nature.

5. Scope and Limitations of the Study

Silko's works explore the condition of nature. Her works are based on reality as the novels bare open the real problems of society, the problems of Native Americans, deforestation, the impact of modernism over nature.

The present research work aims to focus on the investigation of the efforts on the part of ecologists and literary writings, Silko's works make clear the condition of present environment because of modernism and human engulfment in deforestation. Another limitation is the growing problems of women slavery.

6. Hypothesis:

i) The growing industrialization has resulted into deforestation which has a great impact on the environment.

ii) In patriarchal society women have been considered closer to nature than men and that this association has validated subjugation of both.

iii) Silko encourages recreating the proper order of the universe-a balance and harmony between its all elements, all forms of life, as all evils stem from the destruction of this balance.

iv) Land and people are one entity.

v) The Mother principle, which is strong in Indian cultures, has been denied by the white patriarchal culture.

7. Methodology:

The research methodology will be evaluative, interpretative, descriptive, critical and analytical. The selected texts will be analysed through the critical perspective of eco-criticism.

The MLA Handbook of Research 8th edition will strictly be followed.

Tentative chapter scheme

Chapter one entitled, **Introduction- Ecocriticism in Literature** deals with the definition of ecocriticism. As a separate movement or school of literary criticism, ecocriticism started developing in 1990s. In the initial phase particular, it was a meeting place of American critics dealing exclusively with American literature. Being serious proponents of their theory and trying to demonstrate and enable the verification of their results, ecocritics have founded their association ASLE a (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment). The word ecocriticism is a semi neologism. Eco is short of ecology, which is concerned with that environment. By analogy, ecocriticism is concerned with the relationship between literature and environment or how man's relationship with his physical environment is reflected in literature. This is obviously interdisciplinary study, unusual as a combination of a natural science and a humanistic discipline. This unusual combination of the physical and the spiritual can be seen in some of the terms used in ecology and ecocriticism, which both have the same aim: to contribute to preservation and survival of man.

Chapter two entitle **Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: Story as a Means of Healing** demonstrates an ecocritical reading of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and examines the main themes, the plot and the concepts of home, Mother Earth, and wholeness, which will help to create a transformative space and discourse across national and geographical borders. The researcher further intends to discuss the potential of this

text in terms of exposing social and environmental injustice and structural and cultural violence.

In Ceremony Leslie Marimona Silko reveals the author's innovative approach to Tradition, her treatment of the contemporary Indian identity problem. In the novel the Indian stands out not as a "wild, brutal, uncivilized, and soulless renegade", but as a human being who has lost his conceptual identity due to the centuries old denigration of Indian culture, their discrimination, and constant "westernization". Silko considers the question of what it means to be Indian in contemporary America. The writer provides a critique of white colonizers who isolated themselves from the natural world turning it into a convenient object for their needs. The Indian world outlook is no anthropocentric and devoid of dichotomies, individual is considered an equal part of the whole. The Indians have a holistic and ecologically-oriented approach to existence. The material and the spiritual are two sides of the same reality. Silko stresses the importance of tribal languages, land, and community to the formation, or recovery, of the Indian identity.

Chapter three is entitled, **Exploring multiple environmental legacies in Leslie Marmon Silko's Gardens in the Dunes**. This chapter highlights Silko's concern for strengthening of environmental conservation. By applying Silko's *Garden in the Duns* to this critical reading, the researcher explores the significant links between an ecocritical literary analysis and transformative learning in education.

Gardens in the Dunes explores a stunning array of natural landscapes including the American Southwest, Long Island, Brazil, England, Italy, and the island of Corsica in the Mediterranean. Silko's riveting descriptions of the plants and landscapes indigenous

to each of these places and in some cases, those artificially transported to territories to which they are not native reveal captivating idiosyncrasies and political beliefs of the people who belong to each of these lands. As Ellen Arnold, wrote in 1999, "Gardens in the Dunes . . . draws on elements of the naturalist tradition to build an exciting tale of adventure, intrigue and mystery . . . the novel challenges and reshapes those conventions into something that is distinctly indigenous" (40). Daniel Moerman agrees with this assertion, and adds, "I know of no other novel in which plants, and peoples' attitudes toward them, play such a central role" (41).

Chapter four entitled **Almanac of the Dead as a Post-colonial Eco-critical text**, challenges the assumption that nature is merely a thing for humans to appropriate and misuse. In this novel Silko alludes to the history of Uranium mining and the widespread, indiscriminate effects of that industry which informs the imperial occupations of forcefully acquiring of tribal lands and its subsequent misuse. The chapter thus aims to undertake a post-colonial eco-critical analysis of the novel and illustrate the ways in which the imperial tendencies and projects of the colonizers inform the disastrous environmental consequences which, in the perspective of the indigenous, is actually the result of a disconnected, non-reciprocal relationship with the land. The chapter examines this through the analysis of specific characters and the attitudes they exhibit towards the "non-human" world and suffer alienation through their failure to live in peace with the earth.

Chapter V entitled **Conclusion**, aims at the analysis, interpretation, explorations and evaluation made in the previous chapters. The researcher intends to prove the fact

that nature is after all above human race. It is by means of studying the novels of Leslie Marmon Silko the research work intends to bring consciousness among the human beings about the importance of environment in human life. Silko in all of her novels reveals the superiority of nature over everything.

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